

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Ray Okimoto

"So I think that every person should have the chance to decide whether he's going on this path where he doesn't care about anything or going on the other path where he's more sensitive to the world. And the best way to become more sensitive to the world is through the arts, because the arts sort of focus things for you. There's some things in the arts that you can. . . . Well, the old saying about the arts make order out of chaos. It's the kind of thing that makes things a little clearer for you."

Ray Okimoto was born on June 10, 1933, in Honolulu. After graduating from McKinley High School, he attended the University of Hawai'i and majored in music education. Okimoto then taught music in Hawai'i schools until 1964, when he moved to Tennessee to attend graduate school at George Peabody College.

When Okimoto returned to Hawai'i in 1967, he became involved in the Hawai'i Curriculum Center's project to develop an Artists-in-the-Schools program. It was at that time that Okimoto became acquainted with Alfred Preis and the fledgling State Foundation on Culture and the Arts [SFCA]. In 1969, Artists-in-the-Schools became a part of the Department of Education. Okimoto has been in charge of the program since then, and Artists-in-the-Schools continues to receive part of its funding from the SFCA.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Ray Okimoto (RO)

October 16, 1990

Honolulu, O'ahu

BY: Joe Rossi (JR)

JR: This is an interview with Dr. Ray Okimoto, conducted October 16, 1990, in Honolulu, Hawai'i [at Harris United Methodist Church]. The interviewer is Joe Rossi.

To begin with, Dr. Okimoto, could you tell me a little bit about your youth—where you were born, when, what your parents did for a living?

RO: Yeah, I was born in Honolulu, June 10, 1933. I'm fifty-seven years old. And my youth was spent entirely in Honolulu.

My background was—I enjoyed doing things like most normal boys do, I suppose that normal boys do. But I remember my interest in art began because I had a good teacher in elementary school. And in fact, I remember her name, Mrs. Morita. And she was the one that let us do things that we liked to do. She really didn't criticize us for being—you know, this is wrong or this is right. But I remember her particularly because she did a lot of work with art. We did a lot of paintings and drawings. And the thing I remember was that she put things on the board, she displayed things. I remember one of the proudest moments when I was about that age was to have an artwork [displayed]. In fact, I still have that painting. It's just an Easter lily that—I look at it now, it's kind of corny, but then, you know, I was kind of impressed that I could do that. So I guess it was the kind of self-image that the arts bring for the kids that got me interested in art.

But then, actually, I went seriously into an art form with music. And it was because my friends were playing music. And interestingly enough, there was a boy and there were, I think, two other girls that were studying with this teacher. And I didn't start until—I didn't seriously start playing music till I was about in intermediate school. It happened because I was in church—at this very church, in fact, Harris [United Methodist] Church. There was an organist and a pianist who taught piano. Her father was the associate minister of—language minister here. And so I studied with her, piano, until I was about in high school. From then on I started serious, really serious study, going to college.

But the idea that I had some kind of talent, I guess—it was just interesting to me. (Chuckles) I didn't really think I would become a musician or anything. I guess I had a knack for it. So I played the piano. I played a lot of popular stuff as well as classical stuff. Eventually they asked me to be the organist, because the organist was going to be quitting. This was only when I was about thirteen years old. Of course, when you're thirteen, I guess—I can't really remember how this situation was, but I guess you're afraid but then also you're crazy at that age. That's why I just went into it, and I really didn't think too much about it. So I started playing for church services when I was about thirteen years old, without any formal organ instruction because the organist prior to me was not formally trained either. In fact, I took my [first] formal organ lessons when I went to college.

But those were the things that started me off in the arts, I think, thinking back—good teachers, opportunity, particular opportunity, and the fact that it reinforced my self-image. I think that it made me happy to do what I was doing.

My parents were—in the present structure of things, you would probably say we were lower class. In fact, I would say we were poor, (chuckles) thinking back in those days. We used to live in a camp—in fact, in this very block, before it became urbanized. It was called Iwai Camp. There were a lot of houses in that area. And we used to pay rent to this man called Mr. Iwai. But we were living in a house by the park. My mother was a housewife. My dad used to work for Honolulu Junk Company, which was not what the name implies. I mean, they sold mostly hardware stuff.

So we had a normal childhood, except when the war broke out my dad was interned. And he was interned from 1940. . . . I think the beginning of '42 to the end of the war in '45. So I didn't see him for three-and-a-half years, and my mom took care of the whole family. We lived with my aunt and my paternal grandparents. I had three sisters, so there were three, four, five, six, seven—seven of us in that one house, small house. And my dad was let out in '45, so then there were eight of us living there.

So as far as my childhood, I guess that was the only—my dad being away for a number of years was the only thing that distinguished me from other kids. Otherwise I had a pretty normal childhood, I think. I went to Royal Elementary School, and then to Central Intermediate School, and to McKinley High School, which was, I guess, the usual pattern. Then I went to the University of Hawai'i for my undergraduate work, where I studied music. I was in music education.

Then I started teaching, and after two years of teaching I went into the service for another two years. And then when I got out, I was—oh, I took a year's leave just to get back because. . . . I went back to school, for no particular degree or anything, just to pick up things that I figured in two years I must have lost. And so I actually started back in teaching in '59. Then I went to—taught at Dole Intermediate School for four years.

Then after that—oh, I got married. And then both my wife and I went to school,

graduate school, on a scholarship. It was a Methodist scholarship called a Crusade Scholarship. My wife had been a previous scholarship recipient. And we had a friend in the national office that said—in fact, that friend was here back in the church before, then she became a big wheel on the national level. And so she knew both us, and she got both of us scholarships to go to graduate school. So my wife and I were on scholarships for the years that we were away. So from '64 to '67 I was in graduate school at George Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee. My wife got her master's—in fact, she got two master's there. And I got my master's and started work on my doctorate, completed everything that I needed to except writing the dissertation. And then we came home in 1967. In '67 my boy was born, my first child.

And then, when we came back in '67, Leon Burton, whom I had known—who was also a band teacher—asked me if I was interested in working on this project that they were having at the Hawai'i Curriculum Center, which at the time was a joint research arm of the University of Hawai'i and the Department of Education. They were working on the big project which eventually became the Hawai'i English Project. But they were also doing some other research things, all of this funded under Title III [of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965] of the U.S. government, federal government, at the time. And one of the projects was the so-called Fine Arts Project, which was the—the whole concept was that there was a great value to bringing artists into the classroom, especially in the arts, which is important, because if you think about it, in the arts. . . . Well, in other areas you can teach, say, in a classroom situation, you can impart knowledge, but in the arts it's very important that the students also have the experience of seeing and participating in the different art forms in a firsthand way, rather than seeing things like through television, you know. So the idea was that artists make a difference in the classroom. And so this Fine Arts Project was—it started from '66 through '69. It was a three-year period. So when I came back in '67 it had already been started for a year. But Leon Burton, who was manager for both projects, wanted to spend more time with the music project which they had also going. So he asked me to come on board and take care of the Fine Arts Project. It was kind of fortuitous. In fact, I've always led the lucky life, I think (chuckles). You know, things just happen to come at the right moment.

Anyway, the Fine Arts Project was—I did it for two years at the curriculum center. We went to so-called field-testing schools in Moloka'i and then some schools in Kalihi. These were the same schools, actually, which were also doing the Hawai'i English Project, being field tested for the Hawai'i English Project. So as far as getting access to the schools, there was always the precedent, so there was no problem with any kind of communication. They were all ready already. So we went to schools in Moloka'i and Kalihi.

And during that period, the two-year period while I was at the curriculum center, was my first contact with the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, because the state foundation had a great deal to do with starting the Fine Arts Project. Alfred Preis, who was the executive director at that time—well, he was the executive director from the beginning—was always interested in arts education.

And he, together with Leon and some other people from the community—like Nancy Corbett, who was with the Honolulu Theatre for Youth—[and] of course, with Dr. Arthur King, who was the head of the curriculum center. And then there were some others, where they met fairly regularly in terms of trying to decide what was good for arts education, what could be done to improve arts education. I think maybe in—I think it was in '66 that they also had a Governor's Conference [on Culture and the Arts].

JR: Yeah, in the fall of '66.

RO: It was in the fall, okay. That was the sort of like a catalyst to really sit down and figure out a program, a workable program. So that was the beginning, actually, of the Fine Arts Project. So the state foundation, with Alfred Preis, was involved with it from the beginning with that aspect of the program.

So when I came aboard in '67 I met Alfred Preis for the first time. I was very impressed with him. I thought he was a typical European autocrat type of person. (Chuckles) I'm saying that in a loving manner. But I thought he was the most sincere, knowledgeable person about the arts that I had met, even in my college career. He could talk about the arts, because his experience as a European—I guess they have access to all the things dealing with the arts. The opera and things like that, they're part of their daily lives in Europe, where he lived. So I was very impressed with him and his knowledge. So he became sort of like a father of the project to me. Of course, Leon was the one that—he handled the day-to-day things.

But anyway, we all got together. The project, the Fine Arts Project, got monies from Title III, but I think there were certain periods where the money that they had from the Title III was not enough, so the state foundation actually put some monies into the program. So not only Mr. Preis was involved with the formulation of the program but also he was a funding source for the program, too.

So after two years of field testing, the program was put up to the DOE [Department of Education], asking the DOE to take over the program. And the DOE, in '69, took over the program. It became the Artists-in-the-Schools program and became a regular program from there. I think what happened was—strategically they had two different programs going to legislature at the same time. One was the Artists-in-the-Schools and the other was the Artmobile program. The Artmobile program was a program where it was an arts-on-wheels type of thing, like a bookmobile except they had artworks. And it went along to the schools with a traveling teacher. But the first year of the funding the money went into the building of the Artmobile. So the Artmobile didn't get actually going to the schools till the following year.

Well anyway, we started with Artists-in-the-Schools right there, right at the beginning of the year in '69. We started off with the schools that we had gone to in Moloka'i and Kalihi. But we also added Model Cities schools, because at the state foundation they were working with the Model Cities neighborhood. And so Mr.

Preis had contact with the project directors of both areas. Model Cities, I think, included at that time—there were two areas, one was in Kalihi-Pālana and the second was in the Wai'anae-Nānākuli area.

So the first year of our project under the DOE we had twenty-two schools, which was an increase of about. . . . Well, we had eight schools previously, so it was an increase to about fourteen more schools. Now the schools in Kalihi, which started with the curriculum center—since Kalihi was in the Model Cities area, some of those schools were already being serviced. So the twenty-two schools that we started off with sort of became the base schools from which data was gathered, and evaluation was made, and success measured or failures measured.

Then the program—I guess word of mouth through the schools and, I think, careful cultivation of decision makers, like legislators and the principals and—well, even at the DOE itself, I think word of mouth got around that it was a good program. Schools were enthusiastic, teachers were very happy, and the students seemed to be gaining a lot from the program. And so over the years—I can't remember exactly what years, but we've had two legislative increases in the program.

So from a budget of about 22,000 [dollars], I think, for the first year, we now have a budget of 219,000 [dollars] as a line item in the DOE budget. Then we also get monies from the National Endowment for the Arts [NEA], which began a similar program in 1970. They began with the poetry program and with the visual arts program. Mr. Preis—I guess all state arts agencies were part of a network at the national level, where the national endowment gave notice about funding projects. And there was a funding project from the NEA from the beginning for the visual arts residency program. And he applied for that and became one of the first—I think we were probably one of twelve [states] who got the initial grant to have a artist-in-residence.

And we started in 1970 or '71 with Satoru Abe in Wai'anae. He became our first artist-in-residence—well, you know, a lengthy residence. He was stationed at Wai'anae High School, and then he went on to—well, he did [a] work for Nānākuli High School. But his home base was Wai'anae High School. He maintained an open studio, and he did his artwork there, and students were free to come visit him at his studio. And he also did community workshops. I remember those distinctly because it was very impressive to me that there were so many community people who were not artists but just ordinary people who would come to learn. In fact, because Satoru was a metal (artist)—he worked in metal—there were some people from the service stations, and they came to learn about how to work with metal and create their own art forms. I remember visiting an art show that they had, and I was so impressed that these so-called ordinary people that didn't have any art background or studies could do such impressive things. So I was very impressed.

JR: So the community, after his residency, sponsored an art show of people who had attended the workshops?

RO: Well, it was part of the project, yeah. I think Satoru had certain things to do.

While he was nominally an artist-in-residence, he was supposed to do classes for the kids there, and then do his artwork, and then work at the school at his studio so the kids could come visit him. And like I said, although one of his major works [is installed] at Nānākuli High School, I think part of the work was done at Wai'anae High School so that the kids could see the progress of the thing.

Oh, I should mention that Satoru had an apprentice at the school. I don't know what became of him, but he was a very talented boy that worked with Satoru for all that period he was in residency. And I think he went into art himself later on, after he graduated from high school.

And the artwork that Satoru did at Nānākuli High School remains to this day. It's (in) an open courtyard and—well, I guess if you know Satoru Abe, you know that he works with different kinds of forms, but he likes to work with tree forms. And the work he did at Nānākuli High School was sort of like an extended tree. And the kids use it every graduation as a symbol of their school, and then they put leis on it. And so it's part of the whole graduation ceremonies. It's the kind of thing that art does, you know, that kind of lasting legacy that we can have through art.

But anyway, that first residency was very successful. And through Satoru we got whole—not whole, actually, but I think the success that he had with the school level brought other notable artists, like his contemporaries. They worked in schools, like Bumpei Akaji, people of that caliber.

So we worked in Model Cities schools, then after that it just spread around. The whole program, when we got funding increases, went to more schools and more schools, I guess, until today, we reach every school in the state, with either a performance or a residency program. Now a lot of schools today hire artists on their own. So the seeds that we planted in terms of those things, they are carrying on by themselves, too.

It's a wonderful program. And thinking back on it—well, I'm still not finished with it (chuckles)—but thinking back on what's happened, it's just amazing to me that the program has grown to such proportions and that the schools have accepted the idea of community resources in the schools. Actually, it's not a new idea. And in fact, now when they talk about community resources, it's something that they push—the DOE pushes. In fact, with that school community-based management the whole idea is based on the use of the community people as partnerships in the schools. But this whole program has been doing that for twenty years now. So I'm very proud to have had a part in this program.

JR: I think—maybe, if you wouldn't mind—I'd like to go back and pick at some of the things you have gone over so far, if that would be all right. You told me a lot about your early organ and piano playing and those things, was there music in your house a lot? Were your parents into music, or was this just an interest that you had from school?

RO: Well, I remember my mom used to play records. She used to play mostly Japanese

records, Japanese popular records. There wasn't actually any kind of serious or Western music in our home. I guess the interest in music was just something I picked up because certain of my friends were going into it. And I found that I had a knack for it. I guess it's sort of mysterious in the way you find out you're interested in doing certain kinds of artworks or art forms. And so I can't really pinpoint what influenced me. But no, there wasn't any home life that sort of gravitated me towards music.

JR: Did you have aspirations to be a professional musician at any point?

RO: Concert pianist? Hmm, no, not really. I remember my childhood days and my youth as a lot of playing. (Laughs) I really didn't think about careers or seriously going into music. In fact, the church job that I had was just another thing that I did, like going to play basketball, just, you know, doing this and doing that. It was just another thing that I did. I remember going to church in slippers, which I'm embarrassed now. (Laughs) I used to play the organ barefoot. I mean, those are the things that I'm thinking back now. I'm kind of embarrassed now, but nobody told me anything about it. So as far as music being thought about seriously, I really—I guess I didn't think of it as a career or anything like that.

JR: You mentioned the teacher in elementary school and the painting that you were so proud of. Did you continue any interests in the visual arts as well as music?

RO: No. I guess by the time I reached fifth—fourth or fifth grade, I don't remember being interested that much in visual arts at that point. I guess it really depends on the teacher, now that you think about it—you know, how much influence the teacher has on your interests and your application and whatever you want to do. Because my fifth-grade teacher was more into so-called basic subjects like math and English and. . . . Although I remember our elementary school was unusual in that we did have a lot of music going on. Every Friday we used to meet at the school as an assembly and just sing. It's not a sing-along, but you actually sing. We used to sing in parts. It was a huge assembly-like situation. And then certain classes would sing alto, certain classes would sing soprano. It was all a mixture of things. But it really was beautiful. Even at the young age, I knew that it sounded good. So maybe that might have had some influence on music, too. We also had a good accompanist, and I remember admiring her for being able to play almost anything that was put in front of her. But that was up to the sixth grade, I remember that. Then when we got to the seventh grade, of course, you know, nothing. (Laughs) It's just play and good times.

So actually thinking about it now—I'm glad you're talking about these things, because when I think about it, I wasn't really serious about either visual arts or music except in a sense that I know music gave me a lot of satisfaction because I was doing something worthwhile. I guess people were sort of amazed that I would be playing for the church at that young age and that kind of thing. I guess people would be talking to me about it, but it's not something that influenced me later to become a music major. In fact, I think I became a music major simply because it was easy for me. (Chuckles) When you go to college, you're not quite sure what you

want to do. So I started with arts and sciences, then I think my junior year I transferred to teacher's college. And then since you had to declare your area of expertise, I decided to go into music.

JR: Your parents didn't encourage you to go in to something more rewarding . . .

RO: Like a doctor?

JR: Yeah.

RO: No, no. My parents were from the old school, but I guess they were—well, I was the only boy in the family. And I guess then whatever aspirations they had for me in terms of a real professional—so-called professional—career. . . . They didn't really push me into anything. I guess they were just happy that I didn't become a delinquent or (laughs) that kind of thing, so. . . .

JR: So what was the University of Hawai'i, the music department, like at that time?

RO: Well, it's nothing like what you see now in the campus. The music department was just one building. It was a wooden building on the corner of Dole Street, maybe about 200 yards long. And I think they had one administrative office, and about six or seven practice rooms, and then one large room at the other end which was used for choruses and a meeting room for the large performing groups. Then they had another band room way in the corner—where the lab school [i.e., University Laboratory School] now is—for the band room. So that was the music department at the time. Not very big, not very major, and it didn't offer that many things. But I had good teachers, I remember. I enjoyed my college years. I had a good piano teacher who inspired me.

JR: What kind of music, as a pianist, appealed to you? Were you into contemporary, classical music, or . . .

RO: Yeah, I was in classical music, but I enjoyed playing jazz and popular stuff. In fact, my first piano teacher that was here, the one whose father was a minister here, didn't want me to play popular music. So I played on the side. (Laughs) It was kind of funny, because her brother was—well, I used to go to her house for lessons, I catch the bus to go to Kaimukī every Saturday. But her brother was an up kind of person. He was a very now person. When I was waiting for her to come in, for my teacher to come, I used to just fool around. He used to praise me, "Oh, say, that's terrific," you know, that kind of stuff. Then when she came in, I stuck to the classical side. But I remember that because her mom just passed away, so we had a big funeral here, and I saw her brother for the first time in about thirty, thirty-five years. But I used to enjoy playing all kinds of music. At college level they're more open, because they know. So it didn't matter what I played, so long as you practice what you're supposed to and be ready at the next lesson for whatever you were assigned. I had a fun life here. (Laughs)

JR: So where was your first teaching job?

RO: Okay, my first teaching job was on the Big Island. They were short of teachers at that time, I remember, and there was an opening at this particular time. I had just finished my—you know, at the university we have the four years and then the fifth-year [teaching degree], the equivalent to the master's. So I just finished my fifth year—in four-and-a-half years, so I graduated in midyear—and there was a job opening at Kalaniana'ole School on the Big Island. So that was my first teaching job there, my first official teaching job. And I spent a semester there as a band teacher. And I remember teaching health (laughs) and reading. I guess those were the two, reading and health, and then band and chorus.

JR: Did you notice any difference between a Honolulu school and a Big Island school in terms of the size of a program or the sophistication?

RO: Well, I had done an internship at Kaimukī Intermediate School as part of my fifth year, so I could compare. I thought, as I still do today, that of course the neighbor island schools—the neighbor island students are more naive, more open. They're not as hardened (chuckles) as the Honolulu kids. But as far as the level of proficiency, they were just as good in music. In fact, the band I had at Kalaniana'ole School was an excellent band. See, the teacher that was there before me was on sick leave, so actually she had them for a whole semester before I came, and they were well trained. So as far as the abilities, there's really no difference to me. There was no difference to me in the kids there.

I guess maybe the other thing is that in Honolulu they have access to private teachers, so if you really have talented students, you could recommend that they go to a private teacher. On the Big Island I guess you didn't have that avenue too often. Of course, I was there only a semester, and I was new. I didn't know too many people in the community. So even if they had the monies or if they had the aptitude, I wouldn't know who to send them to anyway. It was good experience. It was the first time away from home. I just remember everybody was very nice. (Chuckles) I guess the thing that—it sort of reinforced my idea that I would like to stay in music. It was a good experience.

JR: You came back to Honolulu, then, after that semester on the Big Island?

RO: Right. Then after that semester I went to Nānāikapono School for one year, and I taught band there, and I taught, again, reading and then health.

JR: Why did the band teacher get health?

RO: I don't know. I can't remember. (Laughs) I really don't know. But it was a funny coincidence, I taught both at both schools. But I guess they just didn't have enough teachers to cover everything. So I lived in a teacher's cottage there for a year—of course, coming home on the weekends. I met a lot of Hawaiians—well, of course, in Nānāikapono, you know, the Hawaiian community there. So that sort of influenced my life, too, in terms of, I think, the way I conceptualized what is good in terms of school achievement and what some kids might consider successful, what others might consider failure. I guess you gain a whole perspective on things when you go

to different places, teach at different places. And the fact that we lived there as community people for a year, you really got know those people there. And I guess in that way it sort of influenced my life, too, in that way of thinking about. . . . Well, also the importance of the arts, because a lot of the kids were not great achievers in language arts or math or science, but they had beautiful voices and they could play their instruments well—I mean, not just technically but with heart. So it was a good experience for me, coming from an Oriental family, just staying in the community for a while.

JR: Did you find yourself altering the curriculum in music programs if you had a large number of Hawaiians, say, in a particular class? Or was Hawaiian music part of what you taught in all schools?

RO: No. I guess when I was there I picked up a lot of—well, it influenced the content of the course in the sense that we did a lot of Hawaiian songs, Hawaiian music. Of course, it was easy teaching those things. But not in any sense altering curriculum or things like that. I guess we're so traditionalized by the teacher training that we get, too. You know, there are certain things that you have to teach, certain things that are important. And of course, I was there just a year. So I guess we didn't do anything innovative in terms of curriculum work, but it was mostly in the kinds of things that are really content of the courses. I did think that the community people—maybe that was sort of a prelude to this, the job that I'm doing. There were so many community resources that people didn't take them seriously. I mean, there were people who would be considered treasures in terms of their knowledge and their ability that I met. Now that I think about it, oh, we should really use these people in the schools to complement the curriculum, even the areas like reading and stuff that—I think, you know, those people could have really added a lot, just by their knowledge of storytelling and their knowledge about fishing. Such an opportunity that I think now that, oh, I wish I could take advantage of it. But I didn't at that time. (Chuckles) I guess I was too young and unthinking maybe.

JR: If we could just pause for one second and turn the tape.

RO: Sure, okay.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

JR: You taught for another year, I think, and then joined the service. Is that correct?

RO: No. Right after my Nānāikapono experience I went into the service.

JR: Oh, you did.

RO: Yeah, for two years. I guess the two years I was sort of like (chuckles). . . . I don't

know if you would enjoy being in the service, but I didn't. It was just too autocratic for me. You do things without being—you don't question. The kind of unquestioned authority type of thing I didn't enjoy. On retrospect, of course, you remember the good things and the funny things. I remember, maybe because of my musical background, I was good at Morse code. (Chuckles) I became a radio operator, that was my MOS. What is MOS? Anyway, that was a specialty [i.e., military occupational specialty]. And because the radio was mounted on the truck, I became a truck driver. So my two years in the army were spent unproductively driving the truck, cleaning the truck, and maintaining the radio, and going on field maneuvers, operating the radio. I was part of the communications platoon, COMMO platoon, they called it.

I prefer not to think about that period of time in my life. It's just (laughs)---there's really large blank spaces in my memory as far as the army goes. I mean, there was fun to it, of course, but you remember the good things more than the bad things. I just don't like army life. I just didn't like army life. But anyway, I got out of the---well, I did learn Morse code, which was. . . . I've never used it since I got out of the army. But the truck driving experience was good because I learned to drive with four wheels. (Laughs) You drive stick shift and learn to double clutch and those things.

Anyway, after that two years in the army I got out. Then I went to Dole Intermediate. And those four years at Dole Intermediate, oh, I think were just a great part of my life, I think. I lived in Kalihi with my parents at that time, and Dole Intermediate is right down the street. So as far as convenience, it was wonderful. But the community of people at Kalihi---you know, you hear so many bad things about Kalihi---also in Nānākuli area---but the families in Kalihi, they were so close knit. And the kids were close knit too, so it was a very, very nice place to teach despite what others might have thought. So I taught band there. I had one class in math, but most of my periods were in band, which was really nice.

JR: No health?

RO: No health, yeah. No health or reading. (Chuckles) So I had the full five periods of band and one period of math.

JR: Was band an elective in the school?

RO: It was elective, yeah. There was one advanced band and one so-called intermediate band. The advanced band was made up mostly of ninth-graders and some eighth who were a little, quote, good. And then the intermediate band, which was the eighth grade and seventh-graders that came in. So I had about 100---well, about 175 kids in a day, which made the school happy because it took off the class load of some other classes. If you have 100 kids in one class, then it makes the class ratio for the teachers in the other class a little better. I remember working very hard at Dole Intermediate. I hardly spent time in the teachers' lounge, because the kids were always coming in, you know, recesses and before school and after school to practice. But it was a very happy time in my life, I think.

JF.: Did you have anything like Artists-in-the-Schools at that time? Did you have any artists that came and gave performances or taught their instruments to students or things like that?

RO: No, not during those three years that I was there. I remember after getting out and working on this program I thought how lucky the kids are to have these services. But the band teachers were pretty close knit. We had a very strong O'ahu Band Directors' Association. And there were a lot of times when—you know, when you play instruments, you're not proficient in all of them. So there was some times that the other band teachers would come and help—not during school time, but help maybe during Saturdays, where they would help work with the students in the certain instruments, like clinics on clarinets or percussion instruments or that kind of thing. But as far as professional community help—I guess at that time the attitude was you did with what you have. We didn't even aspire to having people come in during class time. I guess now that the program started, this is the kind of thing that you—I think one thing good about the Artists-in-the-Schools program, it builds up your knowledge that you have all this vast network of people that you can ask to help. Whereas when we were teaching it's, "This is it," you know. I guess we just weren't innovators. We just weren't creative enough to think that there was this vast network of people that we could call on to help. I did send my kids down to—the talented kids—to private lessons. And there were, surprisingly, a lot of kids that were very talented.

JR: What about if you had a talented student and the family was poor or they couldn't afford to . . .

RO: Who couldn't afford it?

JR: . . . pay for a private tutor? Did you ever have to confront that kind of a situation?

RO: Yeah, there was a number of students that I paid for, with my own pocket, for lessons. (Chuckles) There were, surprisingly, not many of them. I remember paying for the oboe lessons for a kid that couldn't afford it. (Pause) I think that was for about a year and. . . Well, I remember the oboe particularly because intermediate schools didn't have oboes. Oh, I was innovative in that aspect (chuckles). I started oboe in the intermediate school. And I wasn't a good player—it's a double-reed instrument, so it's different from clarinets and stuff—and so he had to have lessons. And I remember paying for his lessons. I guess there was another kid on the clarinet. But most of them just—you talk to the parents, and they sacrifice just to have the kids. . . .

And lot of kids bought their own instruments, surprisingly. And I know Kalihi at the time—I know I'm not imagining—it was a poor neighborhood, so I think to buy instruments for the kids was a big sacrifice on their parts. Like buying a trombone which at that time cost about \$200, and clarinets, two or three hundred [dollars], and then saxophones. . . . I guess it reflected on the notion that music was important to the kids and to the parents and the idea that, I guess, the kids needed some kind of outlet for their—well, for their own benefit, to show the world

that these kids from Kalihi could do something good.

JR: Do you think the parents understood that?

RO: Maybe not.

JR: Why do you think they would pay \$200 they didn't have, say, for a trombone?

RO: I think that's one of the things about music, I think. You know, music is—although they don't fight for it in the curriculum, I think if they have a good music program and they see that the kids are getting some kind of benefit from it. . . . All the parents wanted the kids to take band. It wasn't a dumping ground like it is now. The smart kids were in band, the top kids, and they all had the support of their parents. So your question—I guess maybe even at the time they figured that there's more to life than just learning book things and that kids need to have some kind of experience with the aesthetic part of school. I'm just trying to think of maybe a situation which—no, I guess if the kids were interested and they showed aptitude, then the parents would just come and ask what would be a good instrument to buy for the kid. Because the kids ask their parent if they could buy their own instruments.

One other thing—of course, it may be kind of facetious—is that being a poor school you didn't have good instruments. And they're always in need of being repaired. And in that kind of situation maybe the kids got frustrated with the junk instruments, so they asked the parents to buy them. But I don't think that was the main, main reason. But I think when the kids just got better playing the instruments that they thought that was important, convinced the parents that it was important, and so they bought the instruments. They didn't buy the top-of-the-line things, but I think it's something that they got to know.

I'm kind of thinking about that now, Joe. Talking about Dole it just comes to my mind. A lot of those kids there did turn out to be professional musicians. One of the kids sang with the Society of Seven. There are kids who arrange music, so you might not know their names, but they do arrange music for some of the so-called top names in the local music business. And I'm really surprised that some kids that you wouldn't think that would go into music seriously did go into that. In fact, one of the kids became an artist in the schools.

JR: One of the students that you taught?

RO: Yeah. He was a trumpet player. And he was a quiet boy, and I never thought that he would go into music. I knew his parents were fairly conservative. But anyway, he auditioned as an artist in the schools with another guy, and they became a duo. And they played Hawaiian music, but, of course, music that's related to what the kids learn in school in terms of melody, harmony. You put an educational bent to everything. But they did perform, and he was my former student. That was really a. . . . It's a wow. (Laughs) So I was happy.

JR: No, I think you have a right to feel a little proud about that one.

RO: Yeah. Then one of my students is also teaching at the school, Dole Intermediate. He's teaching Hawaiian instruments there now. So you feel that one of the good things about teaching, I'm sure you realize—what makes you feel good is that you see some of your former students in some kind of endeavor that makes you proud. That makes you feel good. Well anyway, those years at Dole were really—I really enjoyed them. I had a good principal, although he wasn't a popular principal, not only in the school but in the community. But he was good to me. When we needed things he would get them. Of course, we couldn't buy thousands of dollars worth of equipment. Maybe Dole Intermediate was unusual. Other intermediate schools didn't have timpani or oboe.

JR: What prompted you to leave that and go to graduate school?

RO: Oh, well it's simply that I got married in '64, and my wife, she was interested in going back to school. And I thought, at that time, that maybe it was okay, maybe I should back to school, too. And I mentioned earlier about this woman that used to work here and was on the national level and that she said she could get both of us scholarships if we went back to school. I think they were a little bit more ambitious for me than myself. I mean, this person, without going too much into it, she was here for a long time, and she sort of took me under her wing. And well—to make a long story short—she had thought I could be something better than I was. And so she said that if I wanted to back to school that she could get me a scholarship. And so, well, okay. You know, my wife wanted to go back to school herself to get her master's. And so we made a decision. We got married and then went to Peabody in Nashville. We spent three years there.

JR: And were you studying education, or teaching, or music?

RO: At graduate school?

JR: Yeah.

RO: No. I went into music. I intended to stay there just one year, just to get a master's, but then. . . . I guess strange things happen in your life. I liked the college atmosphere there, I liked the stimulation, both intellectual and. . . . You know, at the Mainland colleges, especially those that focus on particular areas—like Peabody had a very good music department. They used to have lot of concerts, world-renowned people that would be traveling through and present concerts. See, it was kind of an atmosphere which was conducive to learning. And so after I finished my master's, my advisor said, "Why don't you work on your doctorate?" And so I checked to see what kind of scholarship funding that might be available, and they said go for it. So I stayed two years more and spent three years on the campus working. So I got my master's there and started my doctorate, which I finished in '73.

Gee, thinking back on that period, so many things happened there in Nashville. I

mean, my boy was born, and I got my degrees. You see, at the University of Hawai'i I was still a playboy, I guess. (Laughs) To go to graduate school you really have to put your nose to the grindstone, and I enjoyed it. I guess I just became more mature. Anyway, so that's where I went to school and stayed there another two years.

JR: Did you know Leon Burton before you left [Hawai'i for graduate school]?

RO: Yes. We all were members of the O'ahu Band Directors' Association, which was very close. In fact, Leon was a classmate of mine. He was in the service, I think, before, and he had come back to school when I was in school. He's probably about two or three years older than I am. We were actually classmates, and so we knew each other for a long, long time. Now, I don't know how he got started at the curriculum center himself, but by the time I came back. . . . I guess he knew what I was capable of, and he trusted me enough that he asked me to take on this job. But we were old friends before that.

JR: And what did you think the job involved?

RO: Well, the initial meeting that---actually I had a call from him, I remember, a telephone call. He said that he's working on this project—he's working on two projects, and he needed help on the second project. He didn't explain too much on the phone call because—I guess he said that we could meet and talk about it. I was excited about it. I thought it was a terrific concept. Thinking back on the times, like I said, when I was actually teaching, how much of a help these resources could be in a classroom. So I was excited about it, a little trepidation. My boy was only—well, he was still a baby yet. Leon said it would involve travel and things like that, and I didn't know what kind of extent they would be traveling. You know, this was to Moloka'i, such a long, long travel. (Laughs) I was kind of naive at that time.

Everything worked out. He explained things well enough to me that there was this excitement of working on a new project, which day by day became clearer to me—what we were going to do, what we'd like to see happen. And Leon had a pretty clear picture of what he'd like to see happen, I guess because he was on the project a year already and then also seeing the progress on the English project and the music project. They already had an idea that they'd like the DOE to take it over eventually and felt that maybe three years was enough of a field-testing period. I guess it was an opportune time because Ralph Kiyosaki was the superintendent at the time. He was a very open person. And I think Dr. Arthur King, who was the head of the curriculum center, and Leon were able to talk with him.

I don't know the background of what made the clincher as far as the DOE taking over, but they did take it over in '69. Of course, I guess the thing was that the legislature—they convinced the decision makers. I guess part of it was the legislature, too. So they talked to some members of the legislature in terms of funding the program. I'm sorry—it was the legislature, because they gave us the

money. They gave us an appropriation through a bill to install both the Artmobile and the Artists-in-the-Schools. So it was convincing different levels of decision makers to take on the program.

JR: What kind of things did you have to do when you first started? How far along was the. . . Was it still the planning stages, or had you gotten into the schools?

RO: The book that you have [i.e., *Artists in the Schools: A Proposed Program in the Arts for the Children of Hawai'i*], that was prepared at the end of the field testing-period. Of course, you know just by looking at it that it's a five-year plan, that by the time of the five years every school will have this. Every school had a certain number of performances and certain number of residency activities. So as far as planning, we went on with the first phase. When I came on board, that was the first year of that five-year plan.

JR: I think I was referring to '67, when you came aboard. Had the field testing already begun in '67?

RO: It was begun in '66.

JR: Sixty-six. By the time you came aboard there were already a couple of things . . .

RO: Going on. Yeah, right. The schools were already set—you know, the field-testing schools were already set. You see, when I came on board it was mostly—well, of course, in '66 there was a lot of planning. And I think there were some artists that went into the schools, but mostly it was spent in planning. So actually '67 to '69 was the implementation and planning period. So most of the artists that we had got, I had gotten to know them. I guess Leon got to know them about the same time, too. So we were both—in that sense we were starting off at the same time in '67. So the way we worked it was that through experience we found out what works and what doesn't work. You know, mundane things, even like logistical—I mean, transportation, the time that it takes going from school to school, that kind of thing, and how many performances we can do in one day, that kind of thing, all were part of that whole two-year study period.

So when I got on board with the DOE in '69 we just mostly did things the same way—of course, more red tape. And I had a supervisor above me, Stanley Yamamoto. He wasn't familiar with the program. As I remember, Stan was real nice. I was left mostly to my own means, because I had the budget already and we had gone through the implementation. So we just did it the way we used to do it, the first year of the DOE program. In fact, that was the first year that we did an extensive—not extensive, but we made an evaluation. You know the green book that I gave you? Or did I give you a green evaluation?

JR: No.

RO: I didn't. But that was. . . The first year of the DOE we did everything we were supposed to do to prove ourselves. And then after that—subsequently word got

around about the value of the program. We didn't have many problems. Then we asked for an expansion in—I forgot what years. But then the two expansion times that we got for the increase in funding.

JR: What was the scope for the artists that were being brought in? Music, visual arts, like painters and sculptors . . .

RO: Are you talking about the DOE period?

JR: Well, I think maybe if we can start in your initial few years, maybe the field testing, things like that—what the vision was. And then maybe later on we can look at how it's been carried out once the DOE took over.

RO: Well, the vision of the whole project from the field-testing period was that all kids would have the experience with all the art forms. So it included everything—music, and dance, and theater, and folk arts, architecture. So we were kind of advanced at that time because we included things like architecture. But the artists that we had, I think, covered the whole gamut of the art forms from the very beginning. I remember going to Moloka'i, because I used to travel at that time with all of the people. They were so surprised that we were covering so many different areas of the arts. We had even people talk about the environment. [University of Hawai'i art professor] Duane Preble was talking about the environment even then.

JR: You even published a newspaper, didn't you, on Moloka'i?

RO: Yeah, what was it called? The *Moloka'i Messenger* or something. And then I remember—oh, it's in there, I think.

JR: Yeah, *Moloka'i Messenger*.

RO: And that's because Moloka'i didn't have any newspaper, and so the curriculum center took it upon itself to publish a newspaper. Ostensibly it was as a community service, but more it was actually to publicize the curriculum center's activities in the schools. So most of the newspaper was taken up with things that were going to happen in the schools and coming up.

JR: Artistic events?

RO: Well, not only that but also the Hawai'i English Project things. So it was really a curriculum center—the curriculum center printed that, although Leon and I edited it. And there were news-gathering people on the island that sent us articles, then we edited, and then typed, and then printed for them. But I thought it fulfilled a terrific need. You know, there wasn't a newspaper, not even a *Sun Press* type of a paper then. So you mentioned that. . . . It was a lot of work, but I think the Moloka'i residents appreciated it.

JR: Other than the fact that the island didn't have a newspaper, why was Moloka'i selected as one of your field-testing areas?

- RO: Okay. Well, it all goes back to the curriculum center. I'm not quite sure why Moloka'i was selected. I think probably—when you talk about a curriculum center, you have to think about the Hawai'i English Project, because that was the major thing they were working on. And probably Moloka'i was one of the field-testing [areas] because it was such a self-contained area. And I guess people were interested, the schools were interested, and the administration was interested in being used as a field-testing area. So as far as what our project was, we just went to the schools that were already preselected in terms of the curriculum center. And it was a good situation, because the curriculum center had entry into the schools. So when we wanted to bring in something new, we just had to work—it helped with communications. You know, you didn't have to go through from zero to explain certain things. But I guess your basic question, we didn't have any choice as to what schools we went to at the beginning.
- JR: What did you learn from this—well, it was from '66 to '69. You were only there for two years. But the three-year testing period, what did you come away from that period with?
- RO: Well, I guess the main thing you think about is that the. . . . Well, it's the notion, it's the idea, the concept of the thing that community people, especially artists who are professional and who are working artists, can make a difference in the classroom. I think that's the main thing that, probably, we proved. And that it can be done in a systematic, logical manner and that the kids would learn from that and become more appreciative of the art forms by simply being able to talk with the artists and gain insights from them as to how artworks are created. So this portion of the program, I think, sort of complements what they did in the classroom. I think that was the biggest thing that we learned, I guess, and the thing that we proved it, the concept itself, that it's workable in a logical way. And we proved that by cost-wise showing how [much] different things would cost, and that it's possible within the realm of current budgeting that all these things could be possible. I think that was a big thing that we got from the testing period. I mean, there were a lot of small things, logistical things, like I said before—how many performances we need to give to cover our schools, that kind of thing, minor things. But all those things, I think, helped to just jell this kind of amorphous thing, amorphous idea, into something that can be workable. The whole thing was to make the DOE find that it's a workable program and to take it on.
- JR: Were there any components that you found didn't work, ideas that you had going in that maybe just didn't pan out?
- RO: Well, we found out through evaluation that actually for residencies—well, there weren't actually things that didn't work or didn't pan out, but we found a better way to work is that the longer the artist stays at a school, the better it is in terms of—of course, there's a limit. But actually, the longer the artist stays at the school, the more benefits the kids can get out of it. They can get to know the artist better, first of all, and the insights they can gain about arts creation, by being able to talk to the artist, have more opportunities to talk to the artist, that kind of thing. I mean, some of the things that we learned—but as far as failures, I'm just trying to

think. . . . I guess you encounter different things, but I cannot remember any really big thing that. . . .

JR: I'm not looking for a scandal . . .

RO: Yeah, I know. I'm just trying to think of something that might be an example . . .

JR: I was wondering, maybe certain types of art . . .

RO: Are not workable?

JR: Yeah, aren't workable in the classroom, say, whereas others—music, the kids can sit there and enjoy a performance and ask questions or . . .

RO: I guess in a sense---yeah, okay, I see. I guess, in a sense, the art forms that you lecture about—like environmental arts, urban design, that kind of thing where we're going to talk to the kids and the kids can't do too much about—those are not as successful in terms of audience reaction, kids' reaction. And in fact those particular art forms were sort of left on the side when the district started to request certain things—except now they're working with the American Institute of Architects, the AIA, and they have projects that go on where the kids are actively involved. I guess the main thing is to---one of the things we've learned is that a kid should be—if they're going to be working on art forms, they have to be actively involved. So for the architect's program, they have kids designing model cities or just the environment in the classroom, so they have things that they're doing. So I guess where the presentation's mostly lecture type things it's not so [successful]. I guess it's the same with any other subject.

(Laughter)

JR: Who wants to hear a lecture?

RO: Yeah. Well, that's true. So I guess that's what we found out, but that's the truism for any kind of a subject, I think.

JR: What about the artists themselves, that must be a big variable.

RO: Yes, right. At the beginning we got artists—oh, just recommendations. I guess Leon got the names from various people. But there was a big variation, because some artists, they're good artists but they cannot communicate with the kids. Others whose temperament are just so that they shouldn't be going out to schools. (Chuckles) So we found out through mistakes that certain artists, we don't want to use them again, although they might have a terrific reputation as an artist per se.

The kind of artist you choose (has a great deal to do with the success or failure of any project). So you have to be careful. So what we do is, before we send an artist to the schools—that is, if we're paying for the artist, then we make sure that they send us the [application] form, and then we interview them to find out—at least

get an idea, and then look at the portfolio and their [curriculum] vitae and that kind of stuff before we put their names on the list and then send them out to the schools. So we did have a variety of artists. The main thing is, like I said, to make sure they get along with the kids. Surprisingly, over the years, over the twenty years, I'd say a very conservative estimate of 7,000 different people—maybe 5,000—[have participated as artists in the program]. (Chuckles) And maybe about ten or fifteen isolated instances where it was bad enough that we had to step in and work out some kind of situation where it had become a problem. But on the whole, the artists that we've hired are just wonderful.

JR: You and Dr. Burton were both music educators, how did you find . . .

RO: Oh, working with the . . .

JR: Well, what kind of exposure did you have when you came aboard this project to the other arts?

RO: To the other forms?

JR: Painting and. . . Had you been a connoisseur or appreciator of certain artists in the community or . . .

RO: No, not really. Visual arts, I was illiterate. I would say not literally illiterate, but almost. So the artists in the visual arts, I had to learn from scratch. The only experience I had with the visual arts was when I was in the elementary school, I guess. (Laughs) I didn't go to art museums before that. I was not that much interested. But I did have an interest in the performing arts—I mean, being a musician. And I was a connoisseur of films, went to see a lot of plays. So I was more familiar in the performing arts area rather than the visual arts area. So in a sense, in the visual arts it was more learning on the job. Fortunately, the visual artists that we worked with were the type that you could work with. They weren't head-up-in-the-clouds type of people. But I did learn quite a bit—learning on the job—about visual arts. And then my immediate boss at the DOE was Stanley Yamamoto, who is a visual arts specialist. So we talked quite a bit about the aesthetics of visual arts, and I learned quite a bit, I would say. But when I started I learned from scratch, I would say. (Chuckles)

But then I figured—you know, a lot of people—you're not the only one that asked me that question, because they always ask me what my background is to work on this kind of project. And I figured, well, you're not going to find a renaissance man who is knowledgeable in every subject, although I realize that there are people like that. So you're going to have to learn some things on the job, and for me the visual arts was the area that I wasn't quite comfortable with. In the beginning when we were interviewing the artists, Stan used to be asking more of the leading questions. And so I learned from those things what you look for, then when you actually look at the work of art, what might be possibly good works. But I think with a background in music, in performing arts, I think gave me a half advantage over somebody who was going to come in, say, from left field. (Chuckles)

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 20-27-1-90; SIDE ONE

JR: So after the test period, '66 to '69, you came out with a proposal, and then the DOE took over. I was wondering if you could compare your proposal, your visions for this Artists-in-the-Schools program, with how it actually turned out.

RO: When we wrote that five-year program, we knew that it was going to be written for the optimum conditions. When it was written I guess we really didn't expect that it was going to be—within five years going to be reaching that level, where every school, private and public, will have experience with every art form. But I was kind of, when we first went to the DOE, on an administrative kind of a job—of course, I was a teacher before. But when I first went to the DOE with this job I was just amazed at the amount of red tape that existed, that you had to go through. Of course, there was a certain amount at the curriculum center, just to get your approval for purchase orders and things like that. But at the DOE you have to go through layers and layers of signatures and approvals. It didn't dampen my enthusiasm for the program or for the whole notion itself, but I could see that it was—for them, it was just one small program lodged within this whole bureaucracy of many things that are going on. And they're not going to be that interested in this particular program like it was the lifeblood of the educational system.

And so after the first year I guess I became a little bit more clear eyed as far as the possibilities of the program goes. The first year, because our funding was—I think it was the level that we wanted, very small. And I cannot remember in the five-year plan how, ratio-wise, it was increased to reach the final total of every school. But at the DOE, when you want to work, when you want to get more money, you have to go to a whole system of approvals. You have to write what's called an SAS [Special Analytic Study], as it's called—well, it's for any kind of expansion projects that you want to happen. They are not roadblocks in the sense that nobody says that you can't do it, but it's a whole series of approvals and steps you have to go through.

The thing is that you go through these steps, but then the priorities of the DOE might be a little different from what you're writing for. So I did write, at the beginning, the second year's expansion thing, but it was put down way in the projects. Because in the DOE you go through—if there are any expansion projects you have to get approval from what they call the leadership team, which is made up of all the district superintendents and the superintendent. And then—oh, I guess before that you go through your own level approval, and then the leadership team approval, and then the Board of Education approval. So it's a whole series of approvals, and it sort of beats you down. (Chuckles) So you have to have help from outside sources. Now, the DOE does not like you to go to what they call end runs, make end runs. But if you really want to get things done, a lot of times you have to

just go to legislators yourself. So I guess you have to make some kind of strategy plan.

Our initial expansion monies were gotten from legislators, not from the DOE itself. In fact, both of them were gotten from legislators. Eloise Tungpalan, who is very much interested in the arts—actually, she initiated the inquiry about. . . . When she became the chairman of the house Culture and Arts Committee—I think that was the first time the house of representatives had this Culture and Arts Committee. She probably heard of the program because she had kids in school. And so she actually came up to us and—"us" meaning Alfred Preis. We were in an organization called the Hawaii Alliance for Arts Education. She came in and asked what can she do for arts education. And one of the things we told her was we'd like some expansion monies. So she put it in. And it was a lengthy process, where you have to testify and try to get support from various sources. And so that was a way we got our expansion funds, from end runs rather than from the DOE itself.

JR: What kind of a role did the SFCA play in this program getting off the ground and helping you get expansion funds?

RO: Okay. Well, I would say the SFCA---of course, the SFCA was Alfred Preis at that time, and he was very instrumental in getting support for the program. He was an advocate for total arts education program—I mean, not just Artists-in-the-Schools, although that was his focus. But the support that SFCA played, I think, is really Alfred Preis' doings, because the support that he gave us from the very beginning was not just monetary, but in advice and things that are not just with funding.

You talked to him maybe a little too late in his life, but he's a very articulate and intelligent person that knew the facts of life. Although he was visionary, he knew the facts of life. So he was some visionary tempered with realism. He knew the workings of government, so he was a very helpful person in terms of trying to talk with government people. As the small potatoes in the DOE, you know, you cannot do certain things. You cannot go and lobby openly for certain things. But Alfred Preis and the state foundation did a great deal as far as this program, to get it off the ground. He testified to numerous hearings. And I guess I cannot say enough about the work that he put into this. He strongly believed in the role of the artist in the classroom. Sometimes I was thinking, gee, you know, he's really sincere about this being a salvation of—I guess sometimes he was thinking this was the salvation program for humanity, because he said things like that.

Well, the Artists-in-the-Schools program is the only avenue through which kids can gain access to learn how arts are made and that kind of thing. And I'm not putting him down, because I love the man, but his visions sometimes really scared me in the sense that, wow, if this can happen, then terrific. But I was on the DOE staff at the time, and I knew how things worked at the DOE. Because the money would come to the DOE, not to the state foundation, if there was any kind of expansion.

I would say I was kind of embarrassed, now that I think about it, that in the beginning I wasn't that much of a whole-hearted believer that this could happen.

And I guess it sort of embarrasses me now when I think about it, that this man who has such ability and who, thinking about the future. . . . I gave him all the support I could, but I'm thinking in terms maybe it was psychological that. . . . Just backing him up on certain things. It's kind of hard to explain, but I feel that here was a man who had such visions of the things that education could do, and that we who were on the working—the troops—were not able to help him as much as—could support him.

I kind of regret it now, because at the time we were thinking about, oh, just the daily happening—how we going to work this thing out. It's more mundane things. And we just didn't have the visionary ideas that Alfred Preis had or, I guess, the way of thinking that he had. So I guess your question—SFCA had a great deal to do with those programs, simply because the ideas that he had, the aspirations that he had—well, it couldn't help but rub off on you, on different people. And whether it was supported by various people at that time, people knew that there was this possibility.

JR: What was the nature of your working relationship? Did you have monthly meetings with SFCA, people like Alfred Preis?

RO: When he was the executive director we used to meet quite often. In fact, I used to spend more time with him, I think—no, I wouldn't say that. But I spent quite a bit of time with him, because—oh, at the beginning the state foundation used to write the contracts, though. You know, it was a different situation from now, where the state foundation gives us the money. DOE used to give him the money from the DOE coffers—I mean, the program, the line item money from our program. We used to transfer the money to him. He used to write the contracts. The state foundation used to write the contracts.

JR: Contracts for. . . .

RO: To the artists.

JR: For the individual artists.

RO: Yeah, for the program. Well, whoever writes the contract wields a lot of influence, the way things work. We used to meet with him quite often to decide about almost everything—content, how things work, where we should go, and that kind of thing. I remember somebody making a remark that we spend more time at the state foundation than in the [DOE] office. (Chuckles) Alfred Preis used to—actually, he designed quite a bit of the program, I would say, the early part of the program. The monies we used to get from the National Endowment for the Arts were handled by the state foundation. And I think because of that—I think that was one of the reasons we used to have our contracts written by him, because the federal portion was really strict as far as how the money was spent.

JR: So how was the program funded? You mentioned that the DOE gave the SFCA a

certain amount of . . .

RO: Yeah, we were a line item budget in the DOE for Artists-in-the-Schools. And then the National Endowment for the Arts gave us funds from their—they had an artists in the schools program, too. And then the SFCA used to put in some monies of their own—I mean, from state funds. So we had monies from three sources—the DOE, the state foundation, and the national endowment.

JR: What was the relative size of the . . .

RO: Breakdown?

JR: Yes. You don't have to be exact.

RO: At the beginning it was fairly even, I think. I can't remember what the endowment portion was. Maybe the first two, three years, I think, was fairly even. Then the DOE—I think when we had the expansion funds, then the DOE portion grew larger and larger. And in fact, for today, as of now, I think the percentage breakdown—I was just asked that question—I think it's 79 percent DOE, 14 percent national endowment, and then the remaining percent from the state foundation.

The state foundation doesn't actually put in that much funding into the program now, as far as money goes. In fact, next year—say, maybe about seven years ago part of the money was used to pay for my secretary. And it was stopped because the then attorney general said that another state agency couldn't pay for the secretarial help for another agency. So now that we have another attorney general, (who) said we can, so any of those funds may be used for it. But anyway, the portion from the state foundation has remained relatively stable over the years.

The money from the endowment has gone down, because—I mean, it's not just our state. It's just gone down. They're spending more of their funds for what they call basic education grants in which the states work for arts education, trying to make the arts education basic in the schools. They think more about curriculum stuff. So their artists in residence, their arts in education budget has gone down. Then the DOE budget has increased, not because of big expansion funds in one year, but simply because they add 5 or 6 percent for inflation. And so, because the budget is now about \$200,000, a 6 percent increase is quite big. So right now that's why the percentage breakdown, the ratio of the funding sources, [is] that much. Well, it's good, because the endowment gives their funds based on the kind of support it gets from the state level. So it's impressive that the DOE contributes that much.

JR: How has the program in Hawai'i compared to programs elsewhere in the country? Was Hawai'i one of the first to establish this kind of program?

RO: Yeah. Well, I would say that—actually, our program began even before the endowment program. But I don't know if other states had a program similar to. . . . Because, I think, the money that started this whole thing, the Title III and the

entitlement program, was for so-called innovative programs. And I'm sure there were maybe one or two states that worked in this particular area before. But as far as the endowment goes, they started in 1970 with this program. And they may have had smaller, different kind of funding programs before, but officially they began with that visual arts and poetry thing in 1970. So our program---we consider it started before the feds did.

In fact, I think I mentioned in the first interview [i.e., the preliminary interview] that I was on the panel for the endowment when they were sort of formulating the program. They always were impressed with what we had started. They always gave us credit for saying Hawai'i started their program before they did. And I think I was on the panel mostly because of that fact, that we had started a program earlier. And we talked about our experiences and how we did certain things. The second year that I was on the panel, it was more looking at the applications that came from the states. So it became a panel where you approve state applications. It's a process we go through now. (Chuckles) Yeah, we're always proud to say that we started our Artists-in-the-Schools program before the endowment did.

JR: Have you had any contact nationally over the years, other than that period when you were on that panel?

RO: Oh, yeah. Well, the endowment's good about having conferences, meetings. In fact, I'm going to one next week. It's actually called the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. We're gathering. But they have meetings for peers---peer meetings, what they call peer meetings. And I'm going to be meeting with all the arts in education coordinators from other states. So we have a network of people. And we meet biannually, and then the other in-between years we meet regionally. So I do have contact with the Mainland people. I would say the Mainland people---some Mainland states, their programs have increased tremendously. I would say not in ratio to ours, but they have a big---of course, like New York and California, they have million-dollar programs. But ours stacks up pretty well, I think, with \$200,000. So it's a big budget---I mean, \$200,000 from the DOE itself, then endowment money, and then the state foundation monies for my salary and my secretary. So it's \$300,000---easily a \$300,000 program. I don't know, does the book [i.e., *Artists in the Schools: A Proposed Program in the Arts for the Children of Hawai'i*]---what's the fifth year of the program, the cost?

JR: Five hundred thousand [dollars].

RO: Five hundred thousand?

JR: And it's projected for all public and private schools.

RO: Private schools.

JR: That's one thing I wanted to ask you about, by the way. What about the private schools, and the DOE putting their money to pay for artists to visit 'Iolani or

Punahou [Schools]?

RO: There's a state rule that says specifically that the DOE cannot service private schools. However, with the federal portion you can. So certain things we offer to the private schools. In fact--well actually, when the touring programs--maybe I shouldn't mention this on this tape. (Chuckles) When the touring programs go to public schools, and then they don't need maybe two or three performances to accommodate the schools, we contact some of the [private] schools to see if they're interested. I think it's good policy that other schools know about this particular program. Because I think more in terms of it not just as a DOE program, but I think it's a concept to improve teaching in the schools.

I think it's important for the arts that we have the classroom teaching, then, as well as what we call the experiential, where the kids actually get to see live people and talk to live people. Because in the arts--if you think about it, nowhere else but in the arts do you have to have this. You cannot just talk about the painting, you have to see the painting. You cannot talk about a film, you have to see the film. It's important in the arts. So I think it's for the good of all the people in the state. You cannot just say this is DOE program or a public school program. Certain years when we have the Poets-in-the-Schools program where we have poets that have extra time or we have funding from--where we said, "Oh, okay, this can be considered part of the federal portion," we've serviced [private] schools. Like Kam[ehameha] School has had Poets-in-the-Schools. I don't know if at Punahou. 'Iolani has had Poets-in-the-Schools. But I don't make a big thing out of it. (Laughs)

JR: No, I was just curious. There's one thing that I wanted to ask you about which I skipped over earlier, and it sort of ties in. When you were doing the trial run on Moloka'i and in Kalihi, you had something called the suitcase gallery. What is that?

RO: A suitcase gallery was a traveling exhibit. It was a number of paintings installed within. . . . Well, a suitcase. It was actually really a suitcase made out of metal. It was heavy like hell (chuckles). But within the suitcase were these different extensions where you could install prints and paintings. So these were traveling exhibits that went to schools, to Moloka'i and to. . . . Well, here's one where it wasn't--talking about successes and failures--it wasn't a failure, but it was, I think. . . . Well, okay, maybe I should explain more about it. It was something that you could open up and when you opened it up, it could just, like this [RO demonstrates], it could be like an accordion, open up like an accordion. And the kids could come and view the thing. If it was placed on a table, then they could walk around the table and see the different prints. But it was just too heavy. It was designed for safety and for longevity, but as far as practicalness, it was just too heavy. And the people who had to pick 'em up, they almost had hernias. So it wasn't. . . . Let's see, what's happened to it?

JR: You know what it sounds like to me? It sounds like a precursor to the Artmobile.

RO: Yeah, in a sense it does. Yeah.

JR: If you put wheels—if this thing is as heavy as you say it is, if you put wheels on it . . .

RO: (Laughs) Actually, yeah, that's a good comparison.

JR: Was there any connection whatsoever?

RO: Between the Artmobile? No. I think the Artmobile was Stan Yamamoto's idea. He got the idea from the Mainland. I'm sure the suitcase galleries themselves weren't original ideas. It came about because the [Honolulu] Academy of Arts was interested in participating in the program. And they were the ones who built it, too. But now that you talk about it, I say—I guess that was one of our not-too-good things. (Laughs) Actually, it really didn't fall within the realm of Artists-in-the-Schools, because it's the kind of thing that you talk about, where you don't have a live person that's going to be explaining. You just send it to the school—of course, with ed [i.e., educational] material that explains certain things. But again, it depends on the teacher to talk to the kids about this. So it was more of a class resource. It wasn't a very successful project, but we tried anyway, just like the newspaper. (Laughs)

JR: Did you have any resistance from people within the DOE—teachers or administrators—about this kind of program? Because in some of the research I've done for this I heard someone say that some people opposed it because there's only so many classroom hours in a day. And if you invite an outsider in, it takes up half the day. They can't teach math, they can't teach English, they can't teach other, quote, important subjects.

RO: I think when the program first came about, especially maybe during the testing period, I think there were too many things going on at one time, especially at the field-testing schools. Because they not only had art but they also had the English project. And their school time was, I guess, fractured when it came to trying to service different things that the curriculum center was doing. Of course, there was a science project, too. So there were many different things impinging on the classroom time.

I've heard that comment before about this thing—if the artist comes to the classroom, that impinges on their classroom time. But we've worked it now so that we don't go to schools where—I mean, we have the projects where the teachers ask for it. On the Mainland this program has had problems. Because it depends on the way the state arts agency presents it to the schools. But on the Mainland some teachers are threatened by the idea that there's a non-certified person coming into the classroom and taking care of the kids, and threatened in the sense that maybe it's something of a threat to their jobs. But here in Hawai'i, because communication has been really good about what we intend to do, what the artist's going to be doing in the classroom, what the expectations are, we don't have that kind of problem.

I think the idea that classroom time is impinged upon. . . . Well, if the teacher asks for the artist in the classroom, and the orientation is worked out with the teacher, and they talk about schedules and things—if things are planned ahead of time, then I think there won't be any questions about, you know. . . . Maybe there were some comments like that in the beginning of the program, but generally, I think, when you call the schools they're really enthusiastic about having it in the schools. Maybe some performances—you know, when you try to schedule something for the whole school, the entire school, then maybe there might be some time when one or two teachers might be wanting to do something else. But I'm not quite sure.

JR: The program has been around for twenty years now, over twenty years. What kind of impact has it had on students that you've been able to . . .

RO: To gauge?

JR: . . . observe during that twenty years?

RO: I think students have become more sophisticated. Just talking about the performance aspect, you go to a school and you have a program—and I've monitored the different programs—the kids know how to behave. They're observant, and then they watch, they know when to clap. Well, it's not only behavior, but the kids become more knowledgeable. In fact, there was one dance program where one of the dancers—it was a combination ethnic and ballet program, and one of the ballet dancers wasn't quite in the right position. And then one of the kids who was part of the residency program with dancing just told the teacher that, "Oh, you know, that dancer is not doing this correctly," or something like that. But anyway, that was surprising to me. Of course, it's only an isolated instance.

But I think that the whole idea that kids now are—since the program has been on for twenty years, the kids nowadays. . . . Oh, not that they've lost their freshness or their enthusiasm, but they know that these things are in the world around them. And we can't prove it by attendance at concerts—you know, dance concerts or symphony concerts—because those things haven't really gone up dramatically since our program started. But I go to dance concerts, I go to symphony concerts, I see a lot of young kids there. And you can't say that it's because of the Artists-in-the-Schools program, but to me the success of the program is, I guess, measured by what the kids say or do after they see the program. And we have thousands of letters—literally thousands of letters—from kids. The teachers ask them to write about the program after they've seen it. And just by reading that you can see what kind of insights they have gained about the program. They don't just say it was pretty—"I liked this scene." But they can say things like, "I enjoyed the music because it made me aware"—well, they won't say "aware"—"because it made me think about how the person plays the instruments, how hard it is to perform," that kind of thing. So they know that—they've gained certain ideas about performances.

There really hasn't been any kind of longitudinal study made about what kids have gained since the program started, but—oh, maybe in a sense that the letters that

we get are kind of sophisticated, saying not only things like, "It was pretty," that kind of thing. Oh, I'm trying to think of a batch of letters that came in last week. . . . It made me realize about how important it is to do certain things. It's behavioral kind of statements, as well as aesthetic things like, "I've learned the value of moving in a certain way. The action of the actors made me think that if you do it this way it may be better than moving the other way," you know, insights like that. It's really surprising.

So I can't tell you in terms of any kind of concrete evidence, in terms of what the impact of the program is, but I think by visiting the schools you can see that kids are, well, more sophisticated, and they seem to be appreciative of. . . . I mean, appreciation is a hard word to explain, but they seem to be more into programs. Of course, a lot of it depends on the preparation the teachers give to the kids. That's why we try to send the ed materials to the schools and suggestions as to how teachers can prepare them, as well as reinforce what they've seen.

JR: So, there's a---before the artist actually comes, the teacher would talk about what they're going to do and . . .

RO: Yeah, right. It's sort of description, and then suggestions from the artist as to what they might do before the program and after the program.

JR: The artist comes, and then afterwards there's sort of . . .

RO: Activities, yeah, which are just suggested, because we cannot tell teachers, "You have to do it." But it can be even simple things, like drawing what your favorite thing was. Or just say, "Oh, write an essay," you know, what you learned from it, that kind of thing. Lot of times they write letters, and the letters themselves are indications of what they've learned from the programs. So we have thousands of those. I've thrown away a number of them (chuckles) because the office was getting crowded.

JR: Have you noticed any---this is sort of a parallel question. Have you noticed any impact on the artists in Hawai'i?

RO: I'd say that the artists themselves, the ones that have participated in the program, are much more sympathetic about education than they normally would be if they haven't had any contact with the schools, simply because now they know the strictures and the kinds of regulations under which the schools operate---you know, just simply the things like bell schedule and things like that. As far as artistically, there are a number of artists I know who are revitalized by work with kids. And a number of artists---I guess I shouldn't just think of visual arts. I should think---like people like poets, who told me they (would) like to steal things that kids write because they're so good. You know, things like that. You can tell that kids have ideas, that the ideas are. . . .

I mean, it's the interaction, that it's not just from one side to the other, but it's both ways. So artists themselves, I'm sure---I don't think you can not help working

with kids and not be rejuvenated, simply because sometimes the kids—like the poets said they (would) like to steal things from the kids. But the kids themselves come up with things that might be inspiration for the artist to work on something of his or her own later. But I'm really convinced that working in the schools with kids is a revitalizing experience for artists. That's not unless you think of the job as a chore.

JR: Let me just stop.

RO: Okay.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

JR: You've been working with artists and keeping an eye on the art scene here throughout this time. Have you noticed any changes just in Hawai'i's art community? A lot of people talk about the Hawaiian renaissance, as it's called.

RO: Yeah, right.

JR: Has that been apparent to you?

RO: I think so. I think there's a resurgence of different kinds of art forms—well, particularly in Hawaiian, in the ethnic art forms. I think for a long time the people equated art with Western art forms. But in the twenty years that I've worked in this program—and I'm not saying that the Artists-in-the-Schools is responsible for it. I think it's a total kind of a process where the whole community's aware of different kinds of art avenues. And so there's been, I think, many, many more art exhibits, many, many more concerts, in the areas where there never was anything, like dance. You know, you see dance concerts. It's not an unusual occurrence anymore.

So I think the whole community has become more—(chuckles) my favorite word—sophisticated, more insightful about good art—I mean art in general, as far as what is good art. And it's not the result of maybe one thing, but I think a lot of it has to do with the creation of the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts. I think the idea that artists are viable members of the community just lends that sense of cachet to the idea that people who are in the arts are not worthless people but they provide some kind of benefit to the community.

So I think the answer to your question, the twenty years that I've been back, that I've worked on this program—like I say, I know it's a result of many different things—there has been great improvement, I think, in the art scene, not just visual arts but in all the performing arts, too. Because when I left [over] twenty years ago, I think [George] Barati was the conductor of Honolulu Symphony. And it was

fairly---it was a good orchestra then, but it was fairly small. And now look at the symphony. It's a big business. It's a huge orchestra. The Theatre for Youth, the Youth Symphony, and all the community theaters that---they might not all be doing well, but they are in operation and they are being supported by the community. I think that's a really terrific sign.

So I think, like I say, you can't say one thing created this. But I think it's a combination of factors that have brought about this---it's not a renaissance, it's sort of like a. . . . Oh, it's just the atmosphere and the attitude of people that the arts are important. And so now you see it in the activities that are going on in the state. In fact, thinking about it, it's really amazing to me. I'm trying to retrospectively think about what was going on twenty years ago. It's amazing. In fact, you could just look at the newspaper ads. You could see two or three pages of different things that are going on in the arts. I couldn't imagine twenty years ago there was even one or two things like that. Well, we're not taking credit for that, but I think the schools and the kids. . . . Well, one thing about the arts is that you cannot see the immediate---what kind of benefit immediately to the kids. I think twenty or thirty years from now that kid will see something that really impresses him, that touches him or her, that maybe he's going to become, at the least, part of an audience of future plays, or dance concerts, or music concerts, and maybe at the best might perform himself or [become] an artist himself.

JR: Do you think you have a philosophy of art?

RO: Yeah. I think---well, it's very naive. I think that art is for everyone. I think that everyone has a capacity to understand art, but it's only through education that some of these things can be brought forward so that. . . . Maybe it's just like this interview, where we talk about---where you ask questions, and you focus on certain things. Then you learn about certain things about your environment and about how you even actually do certain things by yourself. And it all works with art, because the arts are ways that---well, the ways of expression. It's the only way of expression that you have that deals with emotion and with feelings. And so I'm working as an educator to make sure that the kids have the opportunity to talk about these things, to experience the kinds of things, internally, that is going to help make him or her a better, more aware person.

Well, it's kind of a jumbled philosophy. But I think everyone has a choice. To go to one end, where they're just going to be---like I was maybe when I was kid, talking about just being a playboy and just not aware of the world. But then through experiences with the arts you become a little bit more sensitized, you become a little bit more aware and more caring about people and the world through different means. I mean, you can't help seeing---maybe a film like *Rainman*, where they become more aware of the problems of the handicapped and that kind of thing. That's a kind of mundane example. But you can even look at paintings and feel music that---it makes you a little bit more sensitive. So I think that every person should have the chance to decide whether he's going on this path where he doesn't care about anything or going the other path where he's more sensitive to the world. And the best way to become more sensitive to the world is through the arts,

because the arts sort of focus things for you. There's some things in the arts that you can. . . . Well, the old saying about the arts make order out of chaos. It's the kind of thing that makes things a little clearer for you. So I think that that's why I'm an educator in the arts. I think that every child should have the opportunity to go one path or the other. And I hope that he chooses that particular path that the arts might provide.

JR: I don't really have any more questions, Ray.

RO: Okay.

JR: I appreciate your time.

RO: Well, no, I enjoyed this. Like I said, I haven't talked steady like this for years. But then you think about. . . . You seem to focus a lot of your thoughts. It was really good for me. I enjoyed this.

JR: That's good.

RO: Well, I hope you can make something out of this. I don't know.

(Laughter)

JR: I don't think I'll have any problems.

END OF INTERVIEW

**The State Foundation
on Culture and the Arts**

An Oral History

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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